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ABSTRACT

A resident college summer theatre can choose between the stock or the repertory forms of production scheduling. In stock, plays are rehearsed and presented in consecutive order, one each week. In repertory, a few plays are presented on a "night-about" rotation basis. Bases for selecting one form over the other include location, type of available audience, experience of the acting company, and technical advantages or disadvantages involved with lighting, costumes, scenery, and properties. From the standpoint of both the quality of direction and the actor's preparation, the repertory method holds certain advantages. Rehearsals are somewhat more leisurely and relaxed, which serves the director's production goals and facilitates actors' learning of the roles. In addition, once the three or four shows have opened, the actors no longer have to be in rehearsal but instead can work on perfecting their performances. (RN)

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"College Summer Theatres: Operation and Administration"

Repertory vs. Stock

Harry Mahnken

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I. Definition of Terms used:

Stock - A resident company rehearsing and performing a number of shows in consecutive order and usually the same number of shows that there are in the announced season. For example an eight week season would employ personnel for nine weeks and might be arranged thus: Week 1 - rehearse show A; Week 2 - perform show A evenings, rehearse show B daytime; Week 3 - perform show B, rehearse show C; Week 4 - perform C, rehearse D; Week 5 - perform D, rehearse E; Week 6 - perform E, rehearse F; Week 7 - perform F, rehearse G; Week 8 - perform G, rehearse H; Week 9 - perform H, close season.

Repertory - A resident company rehearsing and performing a specific number of shows usually determined by what is "comfortable" for a pre-determined number of weekly performances presented in "night-about" rotation. For all practical purposes the number usually is three or four shows performed on a Wednesday through Saturday schedule. Rehearsals are generally staggered but at some time in the preparation period all productions will be in rehearsal at the same time. Thus if we adopt the nine week employment situation as used in the above stock definition the schedule will be something like the following: Week 1 - rehearse A; Week 2 - rehearse A and B; Week 3 - rehearse A,B,C, perform A on Friday and Saturday; Week 4 - rehearse B,C,D, perform B on Thursday and Saturday, perform A on Friday; Week 5 - rehearse C and D, perform C on Wednesday and Friday, A on Thursday and B on Saturday; Week 6 - rehearse D, perform D on Wednesday, B on Thursday, A on Friday and C on Saturday; Week 7 - A,C,D,B; Week 8 - performB,A,C,D; Week 9 - perform C, D, B, A.

II. The Basis for Choosing one kind over the other:

A University's choice of either a Stock Company or a Repertory Company for its summer program may be based upon several factors, some of which (incidentally) may help to define certain advantages of each kind of Company.

The available audience: If the area in which the Theatre is to operate has a summer tourist week-end influx, a different bill of shows presented in the repertory schedule might get the same people back more than once during their stay in the locale. If the area is a summer "resort" in which the population is more or less permanent this basis for choice may not exist. Similarly, if your Theatre is on-campus and you are depending upon the permanent population of your town and the summer University Community, there may be no basis for making a choice, unless perhaps student body and faculty will be present for only one out of a number of summer "terms," in which case the repertory style may be the only way in which everyone who will be on the campus for part of the summer will have a chance to be exposed to all of your program.

The Company: If your company is an attempt to ease your own advanced students from an academic situation into a semi-professional one, then perhaps the repertory company is a less horrendous shock than the headlong and constant activity of a stock company. If you are importing professional or semi-professional actors who have had stock experience this, of course, ceases to be a consideration.

(II. Continued)

The Commercial Aspects: This consideration opens up a can of worms that may be almost impossible to untangle. It would appear that a stock situation should make more money simply because there will be more plays performing more nights. However, this statement ignores the fact that one way or another it will cost more to perform more plays. It also ignores the possibility of scheduling more weekly repertory performances in the last three or four weeks after all the shows have been mounted, and the possibility of using the dark nights of your repertory season for allied attractions, such as a motion picture festival, concerts, imported artists of various kinds, and so forth. (This may be an independent consideration if your theatre is part of an arts festival or some other larger program on campus.) The other tangle in the can of worms is that in a University situation your commercial aspects may not be based so much on how much you take in at the box-office but how little of a pre-determined budget you spend. Thus, in this case, the advantages may be all with the Repertory company.

III. Production advantages and disadvantages of each kind of company.

Technical

Lighting: In a stock situation lights can be designed, focused, gelled, and used for any given show without regard for even the existence of the other shows in the season. In a repertory situation it is pretty well required that lights be designed to serve the entire season from a basic arrangement with "specials" added to meet individual needs of each show. The purist will likely insist that this requirement limits the imagination and creativity of the lighting designer; the purist of another color will question whether the lighting designer in a stock situation has the opportunity and/or the time to exercise his imagination and creativity anyway.

Scenery: In a stock situation, as with lighting, the set can be designed, built, used and struck without consideration for the other shows in the season. In repertory the shows must be built (1) to last for the entire season (2) to be set, struck and stored easily and efficiently and (3) to fit into available storage space. Thus in the stock company the designer, technical director, and crews are working and building as feverishly at the end of the season as at the beginning, while in the repertory situation there is a burst of terribly complex and critical activity until all the shows are built and the methods of setting, striking and storage are worked out. From that point on the staff can work on maintenance and set-ups instead of being forced to continue at the same pace throughout the season. Again one purist will complain about the misuse of the designer's imagination, and another will insist that there is no time for imagination is a stock company.

Properties: In the stock situation properties are collected for one week at a time. There are undeniable advantages to this. First, things that are built by the crew only have to last for a week. Second, rented objects only have to be paid for for a week. Third, things that are borrowed for a week only have less chance to suffer damage and loss. Also it may well be that owners of such things are more easily persuaded to lend them for one week rather than for the entire season. On the other hand, the property crew in

(III. Continued)

a stock company is collecting different things all summer, while in the repertory company the crew collects once and then can spend a relatively less hectic summer striking, setting and maintaining.

Costumes: The same advantages apply in the stock situation with regard to costumes. They are built, rented, or otherwise acquired for one week. Thus in the case of rental pieces expenses will be considerably lower since with most rental companies one pays for the time one actually has the costume in hand rather than for the number of performances in which it is used. Therefore in stock one will pay for one week and in rep (unless rather complicated and sometimes impossible arrangements are made) one will pay for the length of the season. However, if costumes are mostly built for your season, the same repertory advantages apply; that is, once the costumes are all constructed the effort becomes one of maintenance.

Directing: I am afraid that I am unable to escape a certain amount of chauvinism here in that I am convinced that all of the advantages lie with the repertory Director, if only because he is not forced to do eight shows, or a portion thereof, in as many weeks. And I feel that he will be able to do more "complete" work in dealing with fewer shows over a longer rehearsal period. For the repertory situation does provide a longer rehearsal period. Perhaps not longer in terms of hours actually spent in rehearsal, but longer in terms of the number of days between the first rehearsal and the opening performance. And a Director can certainly use those days. One has a chance to get to know his company better both in and out of rehearsal. One has the chance to find out how people work, not just how fast they work. One can go into the script further simply because there are more nights to think about the play and there is more time between rehearsals to develop ideas in one's own mind. There is more of a chance to depart a bit from the schedule to explore things as they come up. And I would maintain that a Director can get more effective work done in the hours allotted; that is, that three three-hour rehearsal periods per day on different plays are somehow "better" than one eight hour period spent on the same play. I can't help feeling that an eight hour rehearsal period ends up providing three hours of "good" rehearsal, three hours of "useful but uninspired" rehearsal, and two hours of exhausted stumbling around the stage. Finally, in an "educational" situation I don't think that it can be denied that a greater number of somewhat more relaxed days of rehearsal provides more of an actual learning experience for a student actor, even an advanced one.

Acting: The Actor, of course, shares in the Director's advantages. He has a longer, somewhat more relaxed rehearsal period in which to develop character, perfect timing, etc. He can get to know his Director better both in and out of rehearsal and thus has more time to discover how he works and what he expects. He has more days in which to become letter perfect in lines rather than approximately correct. During the performance period he can work to carry further in his performance what has been well started in rehearsal, rather than being forced to spend his out-of-performance time in rehearsing the next play of an interminable season. While he will probably have the same number of actual performances, he will also probably have more time between them to think about his role, rehearse on his own, brush up on timing, and so forth.

IV. Perhaps a Disadvantage.

I have, at times, heard one major objection to the repertory situation which

(IV. Continued)

is very real and cannot be ignored. For everyone concerned with repertory productions there is the inescapable fact that nobody is going to pile up an impressive number of roles, assignments, productions, designs, etc. for his resumé and/or portfolio as one can hardly help doing in a stock situation. For the young actor who is attempting to play a lot of roles in a short time, nothing can beat stock. For the young technician who wants to be able to list many assignments in a single season, nothing can beat stock. For the young Designer or Costumer attempting to develop a portfolio, nothing can beat stock. If we are speaking in terms of quantity all of this is true. And yet there is the other inexcapable fact that many of us who read resumés or see portfolios largely developed from stock experience have something of a tendency to distrust the quality of the work in question. I believe that the choice of experience must be made in these terms. Eight roles and an impressive resume or four roles and a satisfying season. The repertory theatre, I feel, comes closest to guaranteeing the latter.